

STAFF NOTES:

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MIDDLE EAST - AFRICA - SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Tunisia

Soviet Naval Visit

The arrival at La Goulette harbor on October 9 of three Soviet naval ships marks the seventh port call by the Soviet fleet to Tunisia since May 1974. One of the ships is a standard F-class attack submarine, the first Soviet submarine ever to visit Tunisia.

The Tunisian government reportedly had difficulty deciding whether or not to grant permission for this latest visit, which the Soviets had been seeking since early September. Tunisian officials, traditionally wary of the Soviet Union, apparently concluded that such visits can serve to counter third world charges that Tunis cooperates too closely with the US. It is more than likely, however, that the Tunisians will continue to grant permission for Soviet naval visits on an ad hoc basis and will not yield to Soviet efforts to secure blanket clearances for routine port calls. [REDACTED]

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Iran-Bulgaria

Iranian Prime Minister's Visit

Agreements on economic and scientific cooperation highlighted the visit by Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda to Bulgaria last week. The talks continued the periodic exchange of high-level visits between the two countries--the last being by party chief Zhivkov to Iran in 1974.

The visit received low-key coverage in the Bulgarian press. The joint communique published on October 6 contained little of interest, and few details on the agreements were released. The talks did, however, carry forward Bulgaria's effort to expand its surface transportation network and industry. Iran agreed to purchase railroad passenger and freight cars, and Bulgaria's director of freight car manufacturing plants will visit Iran in the near future for further talks. The Bulgarians will also increase their exports of meat, cheese, butter, and other foodstuffs.

25X6 [redacted] one of the main subjects of discussion was the improvement of surface transportation through Bulgaria to facilitate shipments to Iran. Both countries still confront the Turkish bottleneck separating them. Turkey's limited rail capacity has contributed to endemic rail congestion at the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Sofia has been trying--with little success--to persuade the Turks to take some cooperative action on their side of the border.

The communique did not mention the question of oil. As the US embassy points out, however, the subject certainly is of more than passing interest to the Bulgarians, especially if there is any prospect that they could obtain it on concessional terms.

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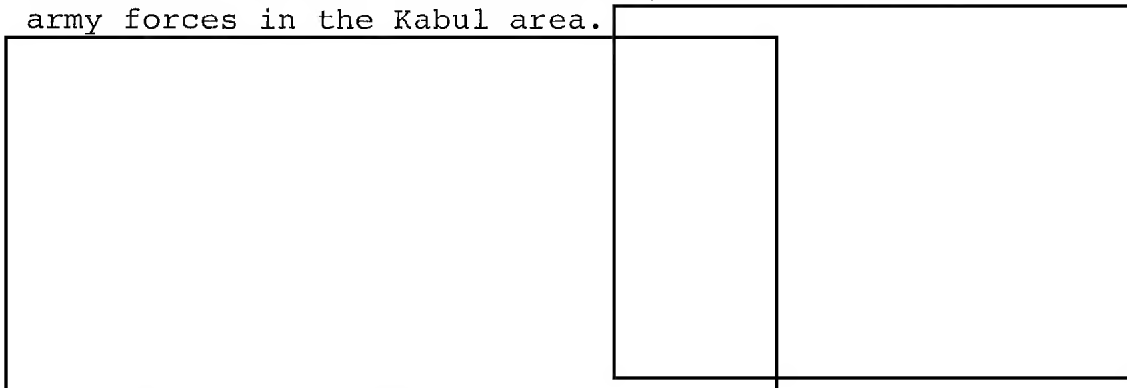
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Afghanistan

Return of the Mohammadzai

President Daoud has lately been restoring his extended family, the Mohammadzai, to a central role in his regime while reducing the influence wielded by leftists. The Mohammadzai clan's traditional dominance of Afghan governments had been diluted somewhat following the leftist-led military coup that brought Daoud to power in 1973.

One clan member who wields growing power is Lieutenant General Ghulam Haider, the commander of army forces in the Kabul area.



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Daoud also has moved toward a reconciliation with another prominent Mohammadzai, Major General Abdul Wali. Wali was the Kabul area commander under the previous royalist regime and was arrested at the time of the coup in 1973. Last week he was released, along with a number of other royalist officials. Wali is expected to leave the country shortly to join the exiled former king in Rome, but some observers in Afghanistan believe he could become a prominent leader--possibly even a successor to Daoud--in the future. Daoud, Wali, and the ex-king are close relatives.



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months he has removed a number of leftists from influential government and army positions.

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Leftists have never been numerous in Afghanistan, but Daoud has been concerned over their ties to the USSR and their cohesiveness in a country where no formal political parties are permitted. He may also have concluded, following outbreaks of anti-government violence in August, that the conservative Islamic tribesmen who constitute the bulk of the Afghan populace were unhappy over government policies and that he could mollify them by returning to a more traditional regime.

In turning away from the left and toward the Mohammadzai, Daoud may also be trying to improve his government's performance on economic and social problems. Many of the leftists in the regime have been young and inexperienced, while the Mohammadzai have run the country for over a century. In any case, Daoud does not want his downgrading of the left to damage relations with his Soviet neighbor, on which Afghanistan has long depended for military and economic aid.



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